



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

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June 12, 2008

Ref: EPR-N

Glenn P. Casamassa
Forest Supervisor
Arapaho & Roosevelt NFs and Pawnee NG
2150 Centre Avenue, Bldg E
Fort Collins, CO 80526

Re: Long Draw Reservoir Special Use
Authorization DEIS CEQ # 20080106

Dear Mr. Casamassa,

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332(2)(C), and EPA's authority under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act (CAA), 42 U.S.C. Section 7609, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 8 (EPA) has reviewed the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Long Draw Reservoir Special Use Authorization.

The proposed action is to re-issue a special use authorization to the Water Supply and Storage Company of Fort Collins, CO (WS&S) to allow the continued use of Long Draw Reservoir and dam. The USFS is proposing to reissue the authorization in the form of a 30-year easement to WS&S for the expanded portion of Long Draw Reservoir. The easement would allow for the occupancy and use of approximately 54 acres of National Forest System land surrounding a U.S. Department of Interior easement. Terms and conditions would be included to ensure compliance with environmental laws. Implementation of all terms and conditions of the authorization would be the responsibility of the permittee.

The DEIS analyzes four alternatives including a No Action Alternative, which is the continuation of current management with no change in terms and conditions. The No Action Alternative is controversial because it would continue to allow operations that cause ongoing adverse impacts to La Poudre Pass Creek below the reservoir. The reservoir was enlarged in 1974, which results in the dewatering of 2.5 miles of La Poudre Pass Creek below the dam to the confluence of Cache la Poudre River from October through May. Other impacts of that decision, which preceded passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, are summarized on pages 2-3 of the DEIS and include: loss of peat beds; loss of wetlands and riparian areas; loss of 25 acres of forest land and 28 acres of meadow/riparian/wetlands; loss of approximately ¾ mile of stream habitat; fluctuation of lake habitat from fluctuating reservoir

levels; zero flow in winter months; altered hydrologic regime from extended releases of high flows during summer into the fall; and unnatural stream morphology in La Poudre Pass Creek which reduces the quantity and quality of aquatic habitat.

The DEIS is very thorough in analyzing the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of each of the four alternatives. EPA appreciates the inclusion of Alternative 2, "Dam Modification for Winter Flows," in response to our scoping comments for this project. Alternative 2 would utilize in kind methods to directly address damage from ongoing operations of Long Draw Reservoir by providing flows in the winter months, and ramp flows in the summer months to mitigated for damage from spiked releases. The DEIS clearly explains why, unfortunately, Alternative 2 would not result in enough flow in La Poudre Pass Creek to provide meaningful habitat conditions for fish due to the current morphology and enlargement of the stream channel. In addition, Alternative 2 has significant dam safety concerns which are fully disclosed in the DEIS.

Alternative 3, "Greenback Restoration," is the Preferred Alternative which would utilize off-site mitigation to provide a functioning metapopulation and long-term recovery program for listed native greenback trout within about 45 miles of streams. Specifically, Alternative 3 proposes construction of fish barriers, on-native fish removal, barrier removal, fish stocking and monitoring activities within Rocky Mountain National Park. The DEIS also analyzed Alternative 4, "Colorado River Flow," which would release water from the Grand Ditch during the summer months (June through September) into the Colorado River watershed to improve wetlands and fens in the Kawuneeche Valley. The DEIS describes how Alternative 4 would improve conditions for riparian wetlands and fens adjacent to the Colorado River, but would only negligibly improve aquatic habitat conditions. EPA considers Alternative 3 the environmentally preferable alternative because it focuses resources on a realistic mitigation goal to use Long Draw Reservoir as a source of listed native trout to establish and maintain populations in a series of connected, high quality habitats.

EPA's main concern with the DEIS is that there is no information on where the brood stock will come from, and how the Forest Service will ensure that restocking efforts will restore pure greenback cutthroat trout. Colorado's native greenback cutthroat trout greatly resemble Colorado River cutthroat trout, and a recent study by the University of Colorado at Boulder concluded that biologists trying to save Colorado's greenback cutthroat populations from extinction over the past several decades have inadvertently restored the wrong fish. The DEIS should identify the hatcheries they will use for brood stock, and explain the science of confirming the genetic purity of the greenback cutthroat used for restocking.

The DEIS states that the success of this project requires a complete absence of non-native brook trout to accommodate restoration of the native species (DEIS page 88). Brown trout are considered the most significant competitor with the greenback cutthroat trout, but extensive colonization by introduced brook and rainbow trout in the project area have also resulted in adverse impacts to the native greenback species. The DEIS should clarify if complete eradication of brook and rainbow trout is also necessary for the project's success.

As a metapopulation with large, connected habitat greenback cutthroat trout would also be susceptible to common salmonid diseases, such as whirling disease. The presence of New Zealand Mud Snails in Colorado, an invasive that could be introduced or spread through restocking efforts, should also be addressed in the FEIS. EPA recommends that the USFS consult with the State of Colorado regarding policies and regulations addressing fish health status, disease certification for stocked fish and stocking protocols which are designed to reduce disease concerns.

As the project will be implemented over a 10 year period, EPA recommends that the USFS develop and implement an adaptive management program, in addition to the Mitigation and Monitoring discussed on DEIS page 23. An adaptive management program can provide flexibility under changing conditions and unforeseen circumstances while ensuring the viability of the restored greenback cutthroat population, and early identification of disease or introduced invasive species. An effective adaptive management program should include:

- A decision tree with clear objectives to guide future decisions
- Targets/thresholds that specify a desired future condition, greenback cutthroat trout population numbers, etc.
- Trends specifying a desired change relative to the current conditions, such as annual surveys for identifying miles of successful fish removal and greenback cutthroat restoration,
- Specific decision thresholds with identified indicators for each impacted resource
- A monitoring plan with protocols to assess whether thresholds are being met
- A commitment to use monitoring results to modify management actions as necessary.

EPA evaluates the potential effects of proposed actions and the adequacy of the information in the DEIS. We rate the DEIS an "EC-1" (environmental concerns, adequate) under EPA's enclosed ratings criteria. We recommend additional analysis and information to fully assess and mitigate all potential impacts of the management actions.

EPA appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the DEIS. These comments are intended to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the project's environmental impacts, adequate public disclosure and an informed decision-making process for alternative selection. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our comments, please contact me at 303-312-6004, or Jody Ostendorf (303-312-7814) of my staff.

Sincerely,

Osborne

Larry Svoboda
Director, NEPA Program
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation